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SUBJECT: DEATH OF BRAZILIAN CONGRESSMAN MIGUEL ARRAES

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Federal Deputy Miguel Arraes de Alencar, 88, founder of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) and three time state governor, died on August 13 of a pulmonary infection in Recife, Pernambuco state. National president of the PSB and allied with President Lula da Silva's governing coalition, Arraes' biography and opposition to the military regime earned him respect and admiration in his home state of Pernambuco, and made him a prominent leftist public figure in Brazilian modern political history. Approximately 15 thousand people went to the Campo das Princesas Palace, the Pernambuco Governor's mansion, to pay their last respects. The crowd enthusiastically applauded President Lula da Silva when he arrived in Recife to attend the funeral, while Sao Paulo mayor Jose Serra--possible opposition candidate in the 2006 presidential election--was booed. END SUMMARY.

ARRAES: A LEFTIST ICON

¶2. (U) On August 13, Brazil lost one of its leftist icons and an eminent political personality in its modern history. Miguel Arraes, an 88 year-old politician from Pernambuco state, died of a pulmonary infection in Recife, closing the final chapter of a political life associated with the rise and fall of Brazil's left. In 1934, at the age of 18, Arraes started working at the Alcohol and Sugar Institute, where he met Barbosa Lima Sobrinho, a prominent writer and journalist who would become Governor of Pernambuco. Upon winning election to the state house in 1947, Sobrinho invited Arraes to become his Finance Secretary, the impetus for Arraes' extensive political career. He soon rose to the top of Pernambuco's state politics, being elected State Deputy (1950-1954, 1954-1958), Mayor of Recife (1959-1962), Governor (1963-1964, 1987-1990, 1995-1998), and Federal Deputy (1989-1987, 1991-1995, 2003-2005).

¶3. (U) Arraes' first gubernatorial term was characterized by populist measures and support for the so-called Peasant League that occupied land to press the government for agrarian reform and is considered a precursor of today's Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST). However, his first gubernatorial term was cut short in 1964 by a "cinematographic" coup: heavily-armed military troops surrounded the Governor's Palace and demanded Arraes' resignation. In a memorable "I'd rather go to jail than betray the people" stance, the governor was arrested and sent into exile in Algeria, where he stayed until 1979, when the regime declared an amnesty for exiles. Upon his return to Brazil, Arraes took part in the foundation of the PMDB party and launched his second gubernatorial term. By the end of the 1980's, Arraes, dissatisfied with the PMDB for what he called a lack of a party project for the development of the country, founded the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB). In 1994, he became governor of Pernambuco for the third and last time.

THE PSB PARTY

¶4. (U) Following his third gubernatorial term, Arraes attempted--for the fourth time--to gain a seat in the state house, but was defeated by long-time PMDB member Jarbas Vasconcelos. During his campaign, Arraes publicly announced he would be defeated by Vasconcelos, which was interpreted by many as an attempt to strengthen his image of a political martyr who suffers for the people and for his principles. In 2003, Arraes returned to the political scene as a Federal Deputy and national president of the PSB, which nationwide includes one cabinet member--Science and Technology Minister Sergio Rezende, three Governors (Note: Rio de Janeiro Governor Rosinha Matheus and her husband, presidential aspirant Anthony Garotinho, were expelled from the party in August 2004 and joined the PMDB. End Note.), three Senators, and seventeen Federal Deputies. According to newspapers reports, Eduardo Campos, former Science and Technology Minister and Arraes' grandson, is expected to become the new president of the PSB, which will hold a convention in Brasilia on August 20-21.

LULA APPLAUSED DURING ARRAES' FUNERAL

¶5. (U) During Arraes' funeral President Lula was enthusiastically applauded by the crowd gathered in front of the Campo das Princesas Palace, the Pernambuco Governor's mansion. Shortly after Lula entered the Palace, Sao Paulo mayor and presidential aspirant Jose Serra arrived and was booed. Approximately 15 thousand people paid their last

respects to the former governor. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva decreed three days of official mourning, calling Arraes' death "an enormous loss for the Brazilian people(His experience and wisdom will be sorely missed."

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